

## **EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum held at the Manor Pavilion Theatre, Sidmouth, on Thursday 6 June 2013**

**Present:**

Councillors:

John O'Leary – Culture Champion

Tom Wright - Deputy Portfolio Holder Environment

Phil Twiss – Portfolio Holder Corporate Services

Town representatives:

David Chapman - Exmouth

Maddy Chapman – Exmouth (substitute)

John Dyson - Sidmouth

Douglas Hull – Axminster

Stephanie Jones – Seaton

Community representative:

Gerri Bennett

**Officers:**

Angela Blackwell, Thelma Hulbert Gallery Curator

Emma Du Cane, Marketing and Funding Officer, Thelma Hulbert Gallery

Denise Lyon, Deputy Chief Executive

Charlie Plowden, Countryside and Leisure Manager

Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Graham Whitlock, Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager

**Apologies:**

Town representatives:

Vivienne Ash - Honiton

Vernon Whitlock - Honiton

Claire Wright – Ottery St Mary

Councillor:

Vivien Duval Steer –  
Equalities Champion

The meeting started at 4.00 pm and ended at 5.35 pm.

**\*17 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum held on 25 April 2013 were confirmed as a true record.

It was noted that Councillor Claire Wright had asked to withdraw from the Forum. Ottery St Mary Town Council had been asked to nominate a new representative and substitute member to represent the town on the Arts and Culture Forum.

**\*18 Declarations of interest**

| <b>Forum Member</b> | <b>Minute number</b> | <b>Type of interest</b> | <b>Nature of interest</b>   |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| David Chapman       |                      | Personal                | He was a member of the Exmouth Pavilion Advisory Forum and the Manor Pavilion Theatre Steering Committee.   |
| John Dyson          |                      | Personal                | He was on the sub committee of Sidmouth Town Council considering the Manor Pavilion and he was a member of the Manor Pavilion Theatre Steering Committee.       |
| Douglas Hull        |                      | Personal                | He was a member of the Axminster Drama Club, the Axminster Museum and Axminster Heritage.   |
| Denise Lyon         |                      | Personal                | She belonged to Friends of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG).  |
| John O'Leary        |                      | Personal                | He was a member of the Manor Pavilion Theatre Steering Committee, the Exmouth Pavilion Advisory Forum and he belonged to Friends of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery. |
| Vivien Duval Steer  |                      | Personal                | She was a member of the Exmouth Pavilion Advisory Forum.  |
| Vernon Whitlock     |                      | Personal                | He belonged to Friends of the Thelma Hulbert Gallery and Friends of the Beehive.  |

**\*19 Manor Pavilion Theatre review**

The Countryside and Leisure Manager welcomed all those present to the meeting. He explained the history of the Manor Pavilion Theatre (MPT) and the appointment of the Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager seven years ago. During this time the theatre had been turned around, was in a very healthy position and had bucked the trend across the country with an increase in ticket sales and footfall. The success of the MPT had been achieved through sound business planning and a very considered, cautious approach. There had been a programme of investment within the last seven years based on the success of the venue.

The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager went on to outline the changes and improvements that had been made within the venue. Some of the crucial changes included:

- Running a professional bar so that income from bar sales went back to the venue.
- The reduction of charges and encouragement of bookings for the Arts Centre. This was now booked for various classes from Monday to Friday most weeks through the year.
- New bookings and societies were approached and encouraged to use the Manor Pavilion during the previously empty gaps. The theatre was now very well used with varied bookings, which were already been taken for the following years.
- Change in opening hours and usage of the Box Office. Following increased demand more staff were employed and extra phone lines installed and in 2013 the Box Office was expanded.

**\*19 Manor Pavilion Theatre review (cont'd)**

Ticket sales had increased by 81% in the last seven years and income had increased by 99.4% in the last ten years. The MPT hoped to keep the audiences it had and to attract new customers as well as reaching out to new areas.

The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager explained that there was an exciting future ahead for the MPT. A new summer repertory season was about to start. Tickets for this had gone on sale the previous week and the venue had seen an incredible amount of sales already. The previous summer repertory season company used to sell their own tickets, but the new company were selling their tickets from the MPT Box Office. This allowed the Box Office to be open 12 months of the year instead of 9 months, with 10% commission being taken by the MPT. The new company had not increased ticket prices and were offering incentives on season tickets. It also had its own PR company.

Within the following twelve months the MPT internet site would be upgraded and improved and tickets would be sold online. Twitter and Facebook would be tied in with the website. The Forum discussed the advantages of selling tickets on line. The Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager believed that currently having no internet sales did not affect business, but that online sales would be a positive step forward for the venue. An online booking facility would generate more customers and income.

The Forum went on to discuss EDDC's subsidy to the MPT and whether this subsidy could be reduced and the MPT to break even. The Countryside and Leisure Manager explained that the budget was considered annually and was set one year in advance. The target was to see a reduction of 27% on the Council's grant year on year. The predicted outturn for 2013/14 was £35,530. The aim was to get to a position of no cost to the Council. However every theatre in the country received some form of grant/subsidy. To achieve a nil cost return would be an outstanding performance.

It was noted that the MPT liaised with the Exmouth Pavilion and did not compete. Both venues were successful at different things and tended to have different audiences.

Members discussed the restricted car parking available at the venue and noted that there was both a District Council operated car park and on street car parking in close proximity. It was agreed that car parking signage should be improved.

The Forum also considered whether the MPT should be run as a charitable trust and discussed whether it could be passed over to Leisure East Devon (LED). The Countryside and Leisure Manager cautioned the Forum and advised it to be aware of potential LED changes in the operational side of its business. It was suggested that LED could be invited to a meeting of the Arts & Culture Forum to explain its future plans.

Members were concerned that the venue was vulnerable to the loss of the Manor Pavilion Theatre Manager. It was reported that an individual had been identified from the existing team to assist the Manager more. The Manager stated that the MPT was a business and that he received a lot of support from all EDDC departments.

**\*19 Manor Pavilion Theatre review (cont'd)**

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman congratulated and thanked the Manor Pavilion Manager and agreed that there were exciting times ahead.

**\*20 Thelma Hulbert Gallery progress update**

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced Emma Du Cane, Marketing and Fundraising Officer for the Thelma Hulbert Gallery (THG). She would be working throughout May and June 2013 to develop a marketing strategy and deal with grant funding applications. If the applications were successful it would bring in a substantial income for the THG. Further details would be brought to the Forum in September. The Marketing and Funding Officer was working with community groups to maximise existing activities, build on relationships and improve communications. She was focusing on small East Devon based Community Trusts and would be applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The other person who had been appointed would be employed from July to October 2013 and had a strong corporate sponsorship background. Both employees would be working together for a few days to agree a strategy for the THG for the next few months.

The Countryside Manager reported that the Marketing and Funding Officer had done a fantastic job so far and thanked her on behalf of the Forum.

The THG Curator enjoyed having another colleague to share ideas with and outlined the improvements that were being made to the gallery:

- Items being sold alongside exhibitions had increased income. Sales for May 2013 amounted to £1,439 income, compared with £716 in May 2012. The figure for April 2013 was £2,602 compared with £738 in April 2012.
- The shop had been moved to the front of the building and the shutters would be in place in mid June.
- The outside of the building would be painted in July.
- The Countryside and Leisure Manager was meeting the Street Scene Manager and the Environmental Health and Parking Services Manager the following week to discuss the car park issues (discussed at the previous Forum meeting).
- Permanent signage would be added to the archway in front of the building.
- Transition Town Honiton were keen to take on the garden area of the gallery. They were already working with EDDC in other areas and the partnership would generate good publicity.

The THG Curator reported a recent family workshop and been really successful, with 100% of the customer feedback forms rating highly satisfied. The THG had been named in the top 20 family friendly museums to visit in the UK and had been shortlisted to the top four of the Art and Health Awards in the South West. The THG had linked with the Countryside Service with the bee event which demonstrated the work the gallery did with the local community. The Curator went on to outline forthcoming exhibitions and the opportunity for associated sales.

It was noted that DCC would not permit the use of additional AA signs. Members discussed signage options for the building, which included increasing the size of the existing AA signs, using private land to erect signs on and adding new signs if the car park changed its name.

**\*20 Thelma Hulbert Gallery progress update (cont'd)**

The Portfolio Holder Corporate Services suggested adding the THG to the EDDC Citizen App. The gallery had been featured in EDDC's Connect magazine, with its own column and was advertised on The HUB.

On behalf of the Forum the Chairman thanked the Thelma Hulbert Gallery Curator and Marketing and Funding Officer for attending the meeting and for all their hard work.

**\*21 Date of next meeting**

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

It was suggested that at a future meeting the Forum should discuss arts and culture across the whole of East Devon and that this should form a forward programme for the Forum.

**RESOLVED:** that the next meeting of the Arts and Culture Forum be held at 4.00 pm on Thursday 12 September 2013 at the Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton.

Chairman ..... Date .....